UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/126
2 April 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-eighth session
Item 59 of the preliminary list*

COMPLIANCE WITH ARMS LIMITATION AND DISARMAMENT AGREEMENTS

Letter dated 30 March 1993 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the text of a speech delivered by the State President of South Africa, Mr. F. W. de Klerk, to a joint session of Parliament on 24 March 1993, announcing developments relating to South Africa's nuclear capability and accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 59 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) V. R. W. STEWARD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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* A/48/50.

ANNEX

Speech delivered on 24 March 1993 by the State President of South Africa to a joint session of Parliament

NUCLEAR NON- PROLIFERATION TREATY

QUOTE

Mr Speaker, when I decided last week to call a joint session, it was my intention to concentrate on the announcement to Parliament of important information with regard to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and related matters. Since then certain developments have compelled me to cover a much wider area. I am, however, still commencing with announcements relating to South Africa's nuclear capability.

THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY AND RELATED MATTERS

Honourable Members will recall that when I delivered my first opening address on 2 February 1990, I emphasised, among other things, the normalisation of South Africa's international relations. An important aspect of this was, and is, the significant contribution that South Africa can and will have to make towards peace, stability and progress in Southern Africa. With this objective in mind the Government has - in addition to many other initiatives in a variety of other spheres - taken far-reaching and drastic decisions with regard to the non-proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction. This includes nuclear as well as chemical and biological weapons.

The Government acceded to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) on 10 July 1991. We became a founder signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction on 14 January 1993. It is also participating in the current review of the Convention on Biological and Toxin Weapons.

I wish to concentrate today on the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and would like to convey important information to Parliament, the public and the international community. It is important that the integrity of the Republic of South Africa with regard to its commitments to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty should be placed above any doubt.

When a country accedes to the NPT, it undertakes, as from the date of accession, not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons. It also undertakes to enter into a Safeguards Agreement, in terms of which a comprehensive inventory of all the nuclear material and nuclear facilities as they exist for the country as a whole at the time that agreement enters into force, be submitted to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Such facilities and material are then subject to international inspection and verification. The IAEA also conducts regular inspections to verify the inventory and to ensure that these materials and facilities are used for peaceful purposes only.

Since its accession to the NPT, South Africa has strictly adhered to the conditions of the NPT and has maintained a policy of transparency and professional co-operation with the IAEA. This positive approach has led to South Africa's resuming its seat at the IAEA General Conference, since September 1991, without opposition, after an absence of 12 years.

The process of verifying the completeness of South Africa's declaration of nuclear materials and facilities has proceeded so successfully that the IAEA was in the position to report to the Board of Governors in September 1992, after a large number of IAEA inspections, that nothing had been found to suggest that South Africa's inventory of nuclear materials and facilities was not complete, nor was there anything to suggest that the list of facilities and materials submitted for controls were incomplete.

However, mainly because of the events in Iraq, which violated the conditions of the NPT by launching a clandestine nuclear weapons programme, certain countries have called the effectiveness of the IAEA verification regime into question. Some countries have also alleged that South Africa still has covert aspirations in this regard and that it has not fully disclosed its stockpile of enriched uranium.

Such allegations are regularly taken up by both the local and the international press, and are beginning to take on the dimensions of a campaign. South Africa's present nuclear programme which is directed towards commercialisation, including the export of high technology products, is in the process placed under suspicion and is harmed. Our country cannot afford this. Accordingly, I wish today to confirm unequivocally that South Africa is adhering strictly to the requirements of the NPT and that it will continue to do so.

I would, however, like to go further. Any doubt about the Government's intentions with regard to nuclear matters, must, for once and all, be removed. For this reason, the Government has decided to provide full information on South Africa's past nuclear programme despite the fact that the NPT does not require this.

At one stage, South Africa did, indeed, develop a limited nuclear deterrent capability.

The decision to develop this limited capability was taken as early as 1974, against the background of a Soviet expansionist threat in Southern Africa, as well as prevailing uncertainty concerning the designs of the Warsaw Pact members.

The build up of the Cuban forces in Angola from 1975 onwards reinforced the perception that a deterrent was necessary - as did South Africa's relative international isolation and the fact that it could not rely on outside assistance, should it be attacked.

Details relating to the limited deterrent capability, and the strategy in this regard, which were at that time developed, are as follows:

- The objective was the provision of 7 nuclear fission devices, which was considered the minimum for testing purposes and for the maintenance thereafter of credible deterrent capability.

- When the decision was taken to terminate the programme, only 6 devices had been completed.

- No advanced nuclear explosives, such as thermo-nuclear explosives. were manufactured.

- The programme was under the direct control of the Head of Government, who decided that it should be managed and implemented by Armscor.

- Knowledge of the existence of the programme was limited to a number of Ministers on a "need-to-know" basis.

- The strategy was that, if the situation in Southern Africa were to deteriorate seriously, a confidential indication of the deterrent capability, would be given to one or more of the major powers, for example the United States, in an attempt to persuade them to intervene.

- It was never the intention to use the devices and from the outset the emphasis was on deterrence.

This was the situation when I became State President in 1989. As a former Minister of the Atomic Energy Corporation (AEC), I was also informed about this.

On my assumption of office as State President it was already evident to me, and also to my colleagues who were also informed, that it was in our national interest that a total reverse - also in respect of our nuclear policy - was called for.

During 1989, the global political situation changed dramatically:

- A cease-fire in Angola was agreed.

- On 22 December 1988, a tripartite agreement was signed at the United Nations with Cuba and Angola which provided for the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of 50 000 Cuban troops from Angola.

- The Cold War had come to an end and developments leading to the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet-bloc had become the order of the day.

- The prospects of moving away from a confrontational relationship with the international community in general and with our neighbours in Africa, in particular, to one of co-operation and development were good.

In these circumstances a nuclear deterrent had become, not only superfluous, but in fact an obstacle to the development of South Africa's international relations.

World opinion had also become increasingly opposed to nuclear weapons, and significant advantages for South Africa could be forthcoming should it accede to the NPT. Although it already had an advanced nuclear technology base and nuclear industry, accession would facilitate the international exchanges of the new technology for its future development. It could also be of benefit to our neighbouring states and in due course to Africa as a whole.

Within this factual framework, and with consideration to all of the other innovative policy objectives which by then had already began to take on form, it was decided towards the end of 1989, that the pilot enrichment plant at Pelindaba should be closed and decommissioned.

Early in 1990, final effect was given to decisions that:

- all the nuclear devices should be dismantled and destroyed;

- all the nuclear material in Armscor's possession be recast and returned to the AEC where it should be stored according to internationally accepted measures;

- Armscor's facilities should be decontaminated and be used only for non-nuclear commercial purposes;

- after which South Africa should accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, thereby submitting all its nuclear materials and facilities to international safeguards.

The implementation of these decisions and instructions proceeded according to plan. The process of dismantling took place under the strict, joint control of the AEC and ARMSCOR. As a further control measure, an eminent professor of nuclear physics, Prof W L Mouton, was appointed as independent auditor to oversee the process. It was his task to satisfy himself that every gram of nuclear material had been accounted for and all the hardware and design information was destroyed. This has been done.

South Africa acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty on 10 July 1991 and signed, according to the requirements of the Treaty, a Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA on 16 September 1991 with immediate force and effect.

On 30 October 1991, in accordance with the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, South Africa submitted a complete inventory of all nuclear materials and facilities under its jurisdiction which contained such materials on 30 September 1991, since which date all such materials and facilities are subject to international safeguards.

South Africa's hands are clean and we are concealing nothing. Permission has now been granted by the Government, with a view to international inspection, for full access to facilities and records of facilities, which in the past were used for the preparation of a nuclear deterrent capability.

I sincerely trust that this unprecedented act, namely the voluntary dismantling of a nuclear deterrent capability, and the voluntary revelation of all relevant information will confirm this Government's effort to assure transparency. I trust also that South Africa's initiative will inspire other countries to take the same steps.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that at no time did South Africa acquire nuclear weapons technology or materials from another country, nor has it provided any to any other country, or co-operated with another country in this regard. Our expertise, technology and nuclear materials were fully protected and dealt with strictly according to international standards and agreements. South Africa has never conducted a clandestine nuclear test.

There may be a perception that the decision to abandon the programme means that the investment in the whole enterprise had been wasted. This is not the case.

The enrichment technology developed by the AEC as well as the nuclear materials which were produced, constitute an important asset for South Africa. They will contribute significantly to the ultimate success of the AEC's peaceful commercialisation programme.

The operation of the pilot enrichment plant allowed South Africa to continue operation of the AEC's research reactor, which is also used for the production of radioactive isotopes for medical purposes, during a period when the international community refused to provide nuclear fuel for its operation.

The nuclear material that was used for the devices has been recovered and will be used to enlarge the production of these and other isotopes. SAFARI-I is amongst the very few reactors which can meet this need.

Furthermore, the application of the enrichment technology to the establishment of the semi-commercial enrichment plant provided South Africa with the ability to provide all the nuclear fuel requirements of the Koeberg nuclear power station, and to guarantee this supply at a time when the delivery of nuclear fuel for Koeberg from overseas was denied.

In addition to this, South Africa's accession to the NPT has already led to the lifting of nuclear sanctions by the United States of America. Exchanges of visits with states in Africa have also taken place with a view to agreements on the use of medical isotopes and training programmes. We have become a member of the African Regional Co-operative Agreement (AFRA), an organization within the IAEA which co-ordinates peaceful, nuclear projects and co-operation between African states in the nuclear field.

The prospects for further co-operation will be enhanced by the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in Africa. The Government has already publicly committed itself to this, and believes that it can make a significant contribution to the establishment of peace and security in Southern Africa.

South Africa will soon be taking an active part in the trans-continental discussions on this all-important issue. We will be supported by the fact that South Africa acquired a nuclear capability, and, in recognition of its new relationship with Africa and the broader international community, abandoned it.

Without accession to the NPT none of this would have been possible. I trust that the book on this chapter of the past can now be closed, and that a new one of international co-operation and trust can now be opened.